

The Complete Guide to Easter Island 2nd edition

by Shawn McLaughlin

Los Osos, the Easter Island Foundation, 2007
ISBN 978-1-880636-25-1 US\$25

Review by Georgia Lee

AFTER READING THE TWO GUIDEBOOK reviews by McLaughlin (see above), those heading to the island might throw up their hands in despair! What to do? Well, dear readers, stress no more. The best, recently updated (2nd Edition) guide, one that is wholly dedicated to Rapa Nui, is in print. It is all you need for your trip to our favorite island.

The Complete Guide has "everything you wanted to know about Rapa Nui but were afraid to ask". In this indispensable resource, you will find sections on the latest scientific and tourist information, history, legends, conservation, island theories, antiquities, population, conservation, and culture... not to mention accommodations and shopping, vehicle rental, entertainment, and island sights. The softcover book contains 350 pages, and is 6x9 inches and has a large fold-out map of the island showing roads and sites plus a detailed map of Hangaroa village showing hotels and restaurants, etc. Also, there are specific maps of the most popular sites, numerous drawings and black/white photographs; plus a new 16-page color section. Under "Sights", the reader can find a list of all major sights and how to reach them; a bit about them including the distances from town to site; and whether or not one can reach it easily, or not.

McLaughlin deals with the hotels by categories: Budget; Moderate; Higher End; and Very Expensive. This is wise because rates fluctuate not just by seasons but also by how many tourists are on the island. He lists many places to eat, and highlights of some of them. There is a section on shopping and souvenirs and even information for those arriving to the island by private sailboat!

Appendices include the Rapanui Language, with extensive word lists; an Easter Island Glossary and Chronology; and a full Bibliography. There is a list of Easter Island artifacts in museums around the world, and a section about dating methods used by scientists; and excerpts from the logs of early explorers who landed on the island.

The Resources section is an amazing compilation of books, monographs, articles, news and popular media, and web pages that deal with the island specifically, as well as lists of museums containing Easter Island artifacts; tourist resources; maps; and even videos about the island. To list all the types of information in this guidebook would make this the longest review in RNJ, but I hope this gives our readers an idea of its wide-reaching scope.

The playwright, Edward Albee, wrote (in the *NY Times*) about *The Complete Guide*: "It is the one guide book you will need." Amen to THAT. This is the guidebook

you will need for visiting Easter Island. Even if you aren't planning a trip to the island, it makes a wonderful resource to keep handy because so much information is packed between its covers. It sits on my desk, ready at hand, at all times.



Inventing 'Easter Island'

by Beverly Haun

University of Toronto Press, 2008

Soft cover; ISBN 978-0802093530 US\$35

Hard cover; ISBN 978-0802098887 US\$85

illustrated

Review by Shawn McLaughlin

IN REVIEWING *Inventing 'Easter Island'*, I found myself caught on the horns of a dilemma because, on the one hand (horn?) this is an interesting, scholarly work of profound implications that should inspire much discussion about what Easter Island was once, what it has become, and what it may evolve into. But within the book's erudite language and well-intentioned message there is an undeniable bias that punctures the equilibrium of its objectivity. This is evident from the beginning when Haun, in her preface, justly takes to task a Canadian artist who committed unpardonable sins on the island by re-arranging rocks and disturbing potentially archaeologically significant sites in order to create "landscape art". This abomination was compounded by the fact that he smuggled film off the island and some of his images were published in a Canadian magazine whose editors obviously have no dignity nor shame in glorifying how the artist sneered at the "primitive" nature of the Easter Islanders who objected to this desecration. And it is here that we begin to apprehend Haun's equation of what this Canadian did with what she calls the "Euro-American culture" that has by her reckoning re-invented the Easter Island cultural milieu and not necessarily in a positive way.

But is it entirely fair to equate what this artist did with what early European explorers did? Are these two types of parties equally liable? Despite Haun's "resistance to the historical accounts", I say no. If the histories tell us anything, if social and cultural evolution has any validity, it is that for the most part we *have* learned from the past, we *are* different. Some of us are, anyway. James Cook comes to mind. And in one particular way what this artist did was worse than what many of the European explorers did *because he knew better*; he had the product of centuries of knowledge about this island and yet he admitted to deliberately ignoring both sensitivities and the law. We may thus rightfully ask if the first Europeans knew better, a question we do not have to ask of this Canadian artist. Nor can we ignore the possibility that what we know of the past is the result of records made not always by the responsible parties but by their underlings or from faulty memories recalled

years after the events — and that this may reflect, but may not establish with certainty, a consequential discrimination, intended or otherwise, that was part of the inspiration for global exploration (and, yes, conquest) that sanctioned reprehensible acts without impunity.

In keeping with this, Haun tells us that “All texts are unstable constructions. All ‘information’ about the island is a version filtered through the perceptions and evaluations of the writers”. Yet if this is accepted, then we would seem to have no choice but to interpret all accounts — including Haun’s — as potentially suspect and therefore those that describe peaceful cooperation and those that involve exploitation and abuse may be no different from each other. But surely this doesn’t always have to be so, any more than it is true when Haun cites Jorge de Cuchilleros who says that “we’re complicit” in the evil actions of others by virtue of our recognition of them, even if they are culturally sanctioned. Just as recognition is not the same as participation, we should be capable of differentiating between those accounts which seek to describe and those which seek to justify.

I do not mean to exculpate those who committed bestial atrocities against the islanders but I believe I have sufficient historical perspective to know that some people are stupid and malignant and others are intelligent and benevolent and that we must not forget the context in which events occur in our interpretation of them. This is one reason I take exception to Haun referring to the “violence of renaming” of the island, because it was neither violent nor is it necessarily an injustice that “Easter Island” as a name would be imposed as part of the “invention” of this tiny triangular world lost in the Pacific. Let us not forget, as Haun herself points out, that the islanders themselves may not even have *had* a name for their own island and that the name that is so often used proudly today (“Rapa Nui”) wasn’t adopted until possibly a millennium after the first settlers arrived — and it was given to them by Tahitian sailors.

At the same time, it’s not that anyone is requiring Haun to be “fair” or “balanced” in expressing her opinions. She’s entitled to them and there is no shortage of thought behind them. But her conclusions subsequently inspired *my* reactive opinion that it is not the scientist’s task to assign culpability or to exonerate when explaining behavior and its outcomes. Is it likely that the Easter Islanders contributed to their demise? Yes. This is what humans do. Is it likely that the Easter Islanders were *solely* responsible? Hardly. There are a great many reasons in a whole constellation of factors that may have contributed to the island’s cultural and environmental collapse — and so it is not always necessary to lay the blame entirely at anyone’s feet or interpret anyone’s actions in ethical terms. But it is undeniable that at least two camps have developed, one led largely by Diamond (borrowing heavily, but probably interpreting erroneously, the intentions of Bahn and Flenley, and perhaps Dransfield) and another led by a diverse group including Hunt and Lipo, Peiser, and Rainbird (to name a few) who seem desirous of not only disproving Diamond, Bahn and Flenley, and

Dransfield but in “freeing” the Easter Islanders from the “guilt” of knowing they were chopping down the last tree but did it anyway. I do not believe that anyone of sensitivity or intelligence is suggesting the islanders were “stupid” in their actions but then, having said this, I am forced to ask if we modern humans should be seen as stupid for what we are doing to our planet and I am thus constrained to wonder why we are may be employing a double standard. Unless it functions in the same way where we must distinguish between what the Canadian artist did and what the “Euro-Americans” did on the island we call Easter.

Into this roiling cauldron of ideas Haun has thrown herself with verve. Her prose is excellent, her research evidently thorough and directed. Thus I appreciate the sophistication with which Haun’s book is written and I can’t deny her passion even if it occasionally interferes with her objectivity. It is odd that she criticizes Hodges’s artistic interpretations of the island for “erasing the Rapanui from the scene of their own cultural production” (which is by Haun’s own admission inaccurate since there *are* islanders present in the engravings and paintings) and further chastises him for taking liberties with the weather as it’s depicted in one of his most famous paintings because it’s not historically accurate “as reported in the journals” — journals that she might have us question as to their veracity. I’d say it’s dangerous to question the creative license an artist might employ even when you *know* the artist’s intentions — but there is no shortage of irony in the fact that Haun uses this famous painting on the cover of her own book. Or maybe this is to make a point?

And if it is irony that one should observe in *Inventing ‘Easter Island’*, there is no better example than the title itself, for the phrase is particularly apt not just because of its implications within this book’s message but because of the whole context of ideas it conjures, in keeping with what Jacquetta Hawkes once said about another place where the stonework of an ancient culture has dazzled and perplexed us for centuries: “Every generation gets the Stonehenge it deserves”. The same can be said about Easter Island. When the islanders weren’t “thieves” or “savages” or possibly cannibals they were fodder for slavery or, sadly, unwilling vectors for disease. Today the Easter Islanders seem to be suffering from an identity crisis brought on by immigrants from Chile or ideas from Hollywood, and even they cannot agree on whether they should follow in the footsteps of Tikopia or Las Vegas. Haun cites the late Clemente Her-everi as having said science is in conflict with the ethnic world while at the same time he asked that the indigenous Rapanui be able to preserve their past by the transmission of knowledge — and yet this is one of the things science does. Are these conflicts really the result of outside influence with ulterior motives or a misunderstanding of what science really represents — an aspect of the Human Condition ever seeking to define itself out of increasing necessity or ravenous curiosity?

In point of fact, the “invention” that Haun would have us believe as a pejorative phenomenon is really a function

of the wonderful resourcefulness of the Easter Islanders, for they have weathered a storm of human and environmental disasters and have not only survived but repeatedly re-invented themselves in order to endure. "Invention" here is the glory of the Easter Islanders. If there is any "invention" it is not an imposition from without but a profound evolution from within.

In the end, beyond the factual information, the bias cannot be ignored but this does not make the book flawed, nor do I discourage anyone from buying or reading it. But make no mistake: If you place yourself in the camp that bleeds for the Easter Islanders, ancient or modern, this book preaches to the choir. If you place yourself in the camp that wants to differentiate between the past and the present and believe that there is a difference in how these are not only interpreted but manifested today (after all, the Rapanui, as Haun says, have a "right to define their past as well as their future on their own terms"), what you may get out of this book becomes a matter of being forced to question whether the same bias the author complains about is inherent because of the interpretation she brings to the discussion or because of objective effects in the real world potentially open to our inspection and thinking. Regardless of which camp the politics of this book inspires one to adhere to, it can justly be said that it continues to support an important dialogue that may eventually produce a better understanding (or perhaps a better *invention*) of Easter Island.

(Note: *Inventing 'Easter Island'* is available directly from the Easter Island Foundation for \$25 plus shipping; all proceeds benefit the EIF Scholarship Program).



Manu Moriori. Human and Bird Carvings on Live Kopi Trees on the Chatham Islands

by Rhys Richards

Lavishly illustrated with drawings, black/white photographs and many color photos, soft cover, 96 pages.

Paremata Press, Wellington, NZ, 2007

ISBN 0-9582013-7-4; NZ\$45

Review by Georgia Lee

THE CHATHAM ISLANDS, 800km due east of Christchurch, NZ, are really off the beaten-track. Only two of its ten islands are occupied—with some 750 inhabitants. Noted for their unique bird and plant species, the islands are also the home of an unusual art form: dendroglyphs, designs carved on tree trunks.

In 1956, The Polynesian Society published *Dendroglyphs of the Chatham Islands, Moriori Designs on Karaka Trees*, by Christina Jefferson (reprinted from the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* Vol. 64). Jefferson was the first to pull together all of the then-known material about Moriori bark carvings, with most references dating to the 1800s and early 1900s. She spent years slogging around the Chathams on foot and horseback, recording the dendroglyphs and

cataloging the styles and types she encountered. A gifted artist, she drew them, measured them, and compiled statistics concerning their occurrence and attributes, etc. Her book has long been out of print. Now Richards has picked up the baton, so to speak, and his book "...written 'from Moriori, for Moriori'" invites contemporary Moriori and sympathetic others to contemplate the carvings as a meaningful part of the Moriori cultural renaissance. Many of the evocative carvings shown in *Manu Moriori* are those drawn earlier by Christina Jefferson, supplemented by recent photographs.

Manu Moriori is divided into sections: "The Moriori Context"; "Past Research and Study Prospects"; "Re-assessing 'Traditional' Sources and Information"; "The Knowledge of Mrs Ngaria Martin"; "Mini Rakete & George Hough"; "Birds, They Were Birds" and "Talking to Birds"; "Polynesian Beliefs"; "Squatters, Talkers and Listeners"; "Tree Carvings on Rekohu and Stone Statues, Mo'ai, on Rapanui"; "Language Comparisons" and "Comparative Studies, Time Markers and Conclusions". Part Two: "Living Trees" is a beautifully photographed color section showing the trees in their natural settings; Part Three: "Dead Trees" discusses those that were cut down and removed to museums.

The bottom line: Moriori spoke to their dead through their tree carvings (p.58), and are compared to the "living faces" of Easter Island, the *moai*, as a way of communicating with dead ancestors (p. 52). Anyone interested in the arts of Polynesia will find much here to ponder, and enjoy.

Note: This book is available from the EIF at a reduced price, with benefits going to the Scholarship Fund.



Moon Fiji, 8th edition

by David Stanley

Moon Handbooks, Avalon Travel Publishing, Emeryville, CA 94608; 2007. Soft cover, 389 pages

ISBN 1-56691-982-7 US\$19.95

Moon Tahiti, 6th edition

by David Stanley

Moon Handbooks, Avalon Travel Publishing, Emeryville, CA. 94608; 2007. Soft cover, 330 pages

ISBN 1-56691-804-9. US\$19.95

Reviews by Georgia Lee

THIS REVIEW IS A DOUBLE-HEADER, for two of David Stanley's Moon's Travel books have been published within months of each other. As a long-time *aficiando* of travel guides, I enjoy them whether or not I am planning a trip because I learn so much from them, and often use them as reference books about far-away places. But would I take them on a trip to Fiji or Tahiti? You bet!

David Stanley's first trip across the Pacific was in